

## Adventures Close To Home: Lucy McKenzie and Marc Camille Chaimowicz

by Michael Bracewell

Lucy McKenzie and Marc Camille Chaimowicz weave a long conversation, aided by the learned and detailed questions of the writer Michael Bracewell. The result is sophisticated analysis of an art that deftly incorporates territories of design, and the importance of making use of artistic techniques and craftsmanship to combine them in one’s poetics.

**MICHAEL BRACEWELL:** Tell me about this show that you’re going to do in Zurich, Town-Gown Conflict.

**LUCY MCKENZIE:** The show is seven of us, all women who use textiles in their work in one way or another. Some are fashion designers who work with small-scale industry. One person is a tapestry weaver, my friend Beca Lipscombe’s mother. A few artists a bit younger than me who use textiles as an inspiration, for instance Verena Dengler, who looks at things like how Abstract Expressionism got domesticated for applied arts. And then for myself and a couple of the other fine artists it’s just an obscure part of what we do, somehow a component, whether that’s writing or embroidery. The impetus was encountering several young male artists who were using things like batik printing because “that’s what women do”. Or still-lives “like an old lady would do”. Women’s alternative expressions have always been co-opted as an outsider position. I wanted to instigate a show with textiles that proves how flexible and interesting it is without it just being a symbol of women’s work. Because it’s not, that’s a complete misapprehension.

**MB:** Do you feel you’re trying to depoliticize textiles?

**LM:** There were enough people I knew who used it in interesting ways. None of the artists are historical. Sonia Delaunay isn’t in it. It’s contemporary work, just people I know who work with textiles. Combined with being reactive to a perceived position by certain male artists.

**MB:** How did you become interested in working with textiles?

**LM:** Specifically through my friend and collaborator Beca Lipscombe. She’s a fashion designer, and I became a model for her about 10 years ago. I thought the clothes were nice, but a few years later I realized that she made them all in Scotland, and it was all about trying to see what could be done locally. Her position and references were quite unusual, we had some common ground, and slowly we began to work together. In the past I’ve been very concerned with music, partly informed by doing it myself but mainly by being around people who did it. Now I’m close to her, so it’s natural to be excited by textiles. Beca and I were preparing some writing a few weeks ago, and we were considering a loaded and problematic term like “muse”, which is often used for women in both art and fashion. As much as we hate the cliché, we do function a bit like muses for each other.

MB: I remember once when we very first spoke, we talked about that line that Gilbert and George have always had, “Advance through friendship”. And you said that was something you could really acknowledge. Has that been a basis of your work? For instance Flourish. Ask a friend, ask a friend.

LM: Yes, although of course it does feel strange when you have friendships that come to an end. There have been artists I worked intensely with, and now don’t have any contact with any more. This is the sad side of it, the lines of where the friendship is or isn’t “useful”. Not to be callous or take advantage, but you grow up together and at a certain point you begin to want different things.

MB: The Victoria and Albert Museum is doing their exhibition *The Cult of Beauty: The Aesthetic Movement 1860-1900*. I went to see it last week. I think it’s a very, very good show even though a little bit of it is very familiar. It really struck a chord as far as I was concerned with both of your work. And I wondered about the root both of you as artists work from – a position of aesthetics in that kind of “Aesthetic movement” sense of the word. In other words the cult of beauty, about an art for art’s sake, and how do you make that art for art’s sake A) derive philosophically, and B) have its place in lifestyle, in what Peter York said in the 1970s about art-directed lifestyles. Is this a lineage that you feel a part of?

LM: My main understanding of the Aesthetic movement comes from the London Weekend Television miniseries *Lillie Langtry*. No, I would place myself slightly to the side of that along with the Arts and Crafts movement, which attempted to sincerely engage with industry and the real world in general.

MB: So it’s about craft.

LM: At the moment, yes. [to Marc Camille] You also make things. From our conversations on this subject in the past, I know that you place what you are doing clearly as art, using craft elements within that, which is not how I staunchly see my work.

MB: And also huge amounts of research into the history of design.

MARC CAMILLE CHAIMOWICZ: My initial engagement with the misunderstood Arts and Crafts legacy was based on a fascination I had. I was initially drawn to a dialectic between what is named and what is unnamed. It seemed to me that the visual arts are inherently about the artist asking questions, which are inevitably directly or indirectly related to his or her identity. A kind of portrait. Whereas the craft tradition is about the opposite. Certainly from medieval times, craft is made by people whose names are absent from the work, however grand the work might be, stonemasons or otherwise. They aren’t asking questions, they are coming up with answers. So in a design sense if we look at this cake stand, for example, it doesn’t question anything. A good piece of design – and this probably is, because it’s lasted – will say, “I am what I am”. It’s instantly recognizable for what it is, whereas I think the best visual art often isn’t easy to understand on the first take. And that’s one of the things that interests me about Lucy’s work, what I know of it, is that it is quite elusive. It’s got conscious slippage. Whereas design work should not have, in my mind. So in that sense my take on design is an ideological way of counterpointing the inherently elitist nature of visual art practice by – as Beca Lipscombe would probably propose – forwarding

oneself as a kind of journeyman who is therefore able to offset any kind of need. If they're called upon by a company to design, for instance, a range of knitwear.

LM: Beca has a day job as a co-designer at a cashmere mill in Scotland. One proposed model is a jumper featuring intarsia devised from a work by Marc Camille. She made a sample using black, and this was an issue because you don't use black in your work, do you, Marc?

MCC: I bumped into Beca recently and said, could we maybe attempt charcoal gray? She said yes, I think we can. But it was shocking. I've never used black. I couldn't use black, not in the way that Matisse could. In fact, when I've used black, when I've given drawings for instance recently to Dovecot Studios, who did an excellent interpretive job of making a rug, I'll always say, with reference to the darkest line work, just go out and buy a bar of 90 percent dark chocolate, and that'll be your color reference. Black, especially in a rug, would just be too violent.

LM: And this is why you don't like Charles Rennie Mackintosh, because of all the black?

MCC: One of the many reasons!

LM: You don't like his white rooms?

MCC: I like his architecture. I just have a problem with his furniture design, it seems so aggressive. I get scared in the library at the Glasgow School of Art. Consciously or otherwise, I think it's a profoundly anti-intellectual proposition because his light fittings, though very grand, look just like guillotines. I have this vision of the reader, sitting in studious engagement, finding that his or her head is chopped off by one of Charles Rennie Mackintosh's lights. It's pretty violent.

LM: As you ascend to the top of the art school the light is controlled in a certain way so that it seems to get darker, and there are barred grilles like in a prison. Fitting for an art school.

MCC: You didn't actually study there, did you?

LM: No, I didn't get accepted.

MCC: Good.

LM: I'm really glad I didn't go.

MB: [to Lucy] When you started making work, it seemed to represent a very radical moment. You seemed to be coming at things in a completely different way than your peers. It was almost like you were dealing with a completely different language, in order to say completely different things.

LM: In the context of Glasgow?

MB: In contemporary British art at that time. Which if anything seemed to be slightly lost, wandering between big, peculiar paintings and... Have you always felt that you knew what you wanted to be doing? Are you led by doubt?

LM: As a child my only ambition was to be an art student. To be like those well-dressed ‘80s girls that my dad taught.

MB: The only person who’s ever said that to me was Brian Eno.

LM: Perfect! No, there’s not a lot of doubt. When there is, I make a change. Going to study decorative painting was born out of boredom at what seemed like my trajectory. I wanted to do something else, learn something else, change course, and it worked. But I don’t know how much artistic torment is related to personality. I’m not a very doubtful person. I’m rather content.

MCC: I’ve long admired Lucy. It seems to me that there’s less persona about Lucy that there is with other artists. Other artists need to protect themselves because of their doubt, or sense of vulnerability, through a construct that is a kind of shell that protects them as they negotiate the mean, nasty external world. I think that with Lucy there’s less of a barrier between the inner and the outer. It’s as though she is a fish in water, and there’s a kind of ease in the way her questions take form. Different currents have different impacts on different projects. It all feels very natural.

LM: It’s the way I was brought up. I never thought that I wasn’t welcome in the art world because it was just a strand of culture and I was not by default an outsider. I already knew that when I was 15. When I was in my late teens and early 20s I did soft pornographic modeling as a summer job, and I remember thinking at the time that it was somehow connected to deciding to be an artist, rather than having a proper job. I didn’t know at the time that the reception of this kind of pornographic image would change so much, à la Tom Ford, Terry Richardson, American Apparel, et cetera.

MB: Do you think the common denominator between both of your motives as artists is an engagement with all the blessings and curses of the romantic? Romanticism? [to Marc Camille] When I saw your show at the Vienna Secession, that was one of the most intensely romantic rooms I think I’ve ever been in. It was like inhaling talcum powder. It was absolutely astonishing.

MCC: I guess it was, given the venue, and given my very complex position relative to the Viennese legacy. But I think there was also a high degree of projection that came out of an almost psychotic misunderstanding of what Austria was. There were geographic areas associated with High Romanticism in Germany that were forbidden to me because of my paternal background. In a way it’s the antithesis of what Lucy is talking about. With Lucy there’s this delightful continuum, this threadlike link, with her father. In my case, within the family home we just could not talk about the Second World War. So I did project massively when living in Vienna in the 1980s, in a highly visual way. And when an invitation to show at Secession emerged, I guess it was the premise on which to return. A kind of thank-you 30 years on, an acknowledgment of the importance that living there had had for my thinking. It was intensely personal, more so than most exhibitions. But it didn’t come over as biographical, hopefully.

MB: Samuel Beckett says that an artist is a person who has an inner text that he needs to translate. This idea of the translation out of the personal into the universal is precisely what you achieved with that show. Another thing that I’ve always felt about both of you – again I’m talking as a generalist, a tourist in the art world – is that you seemed to reconnect with this really refreshing idea of the European at a time when the Scottish scene and the London scene had

reached a point of self-satisfaction and safety. [to Lucy] I remember when you started working with Paulina Olowska.

LM: Yes, we found and reinforced in each other a kind of antiquated European-ness, with the romance of being from different sides of Europe.

MCC: That's the most insightful take.

LM: Regarding Romanticism, the actual fabrication of my work is extremely dispassionate because I'm using techniques that are purely about procedure. They were taught to people 150 years ago who weren't artists, they were just 16 years old learning how to make fake wood or fake marble, or how to paint a woman's face the way you should paint it if you have to do it 50 times 'round a dado rail. It's as formulaic as Stephen King or Patricia Highsmith, a kind of trick bag. My allowance of Romanticism is placed in how the images I paint, or things I want to make, are chosen. In the past my adolescence seemed to be extremely important to me, but now that I've started making clothes I've been thinking much more about my childhood and my mother. She has a senior position in a domestic violence charity, and brought me up to think I could do anything I wanted. Yet my sister and I were dressed in sweet velvet dresses and we flounced around like Kate Greenaway characters. That for me is very romantic, the double message of feminine whimsy and female empowerment.

MB: Do tell me if I'm barking up the wrong tree, but that seems to come back to this idea of the art-directed lifestyle. There's a part of you that is absolutely fascinated with the idea of the House Beautiful, living as an extension of that.

LM: That's where "The Cult of Beauty" exhibition was very interesting, the section documenting the ridicule of those who tried to "live up to their china". I think that interiors should be truly reflective of the personality, should be formed over years, not predetermined. In Brussels many artists work at home, and their home becomes that reflection.

MB: You did that wonderful series of Nicky Haslam's interiors for Bryan Ferry.

LM: The best way to learn about interiors is to make them, or at least reproduce them, and the same goes for ornament and pattern. What I like with the photos of Bryan Ferry's interior is seeing how a familiar little attic flat is made completely grandiose. *World of Interiors* magazine, where they were originally published, is a fantastic guide of how to build rooms that combine historical order and human wear. By drawing Bryan Ferry's flat I wanted to get inside it and understand it. You saw all these supporting beams, that the stucco was new, that the classicism had been fabricated out of nothing. And the only way I could learn it was to draw it.

MB: What you're saying is that through studying the photograph and drawing it, you began to realize quite what an act of artifice the whole thing was. It is basically a stage set, and Nicky rolls up and does his thing.

MCC: It's fascinating too in that there's a kind of transfer of the most traditional if not conservative form of art education. For example when I went to Camberwell College of Arts to do my first degree in painting, we were sent to the National Gallery and told to copy Cézannes, and in so doing hopefully to gain a better understanding of what Cézanne was about. Of course that was

brainless, whereas in your case it's conscious. You're directing yourself to a thing that interests you.

MB: Do you feel that that art school copying exercise assisted you?

MCC: Only in that it strengthened my sense of rebellion! I became more and more contemptuous of tradition in art education. In retrospect I don't regret having chosen to go to a conservative school because at least it gave one values to react against. That seems much more difficult now. Most students are taught that anything goes, and the values are so much more complex. When I was studying, there was implicitly a consensus, and now there isn't. Bad is good, good is bad, where do you site yourself? It's complicated. However we're not here just to talk about art education.

LM: Well, I would like to talk about it briefly, because I just became a professor at Kunstverein Düsseldorf.

MB: The holy of holies in Germany, isn't it? Beuys taught there.

LM: Beuys taught there, and the Bechers. I'm going to try to teach procedural painting because they're mostly still thinking that painting is about emotion, and the moment. I was trying to explain recently that we're always between two poles: academy and tradition at one end, and personal free expression at the other. We're calibrating somewhere between these two points at all times, and an awareness of both is useful. I will introduce decorative painting techniques to them. Some are desperate because they've never been taught anything, and it's exactly what they want at this point. That's the way it was for me, after years of playing around and doing different things, I knew to go any further I needed to seriously study again.

MB: Robert Hughes writes this extraordinary essay called “The Decline of the City of Mahagonny,” and he lambasts American art education in the 1980s, saying that what was being taught was free expression, and then he adds very acidly, “At this no one could fail”. Do you feel that your students are feeling similarly starved for substance, that they've had concept until it's coming out of their ears, but what they actually want is instruction?

LM: Yes, for the ones who want it, I am there. I will teach these techniques and they can interpret them if they want, how they want.

MB: So are you creating your own basic course? What Richard Hamilton did in the late 1950s, beginning growth and form?

LM: Absolutely. Now I have to make explanatory posters about how wood grows, et cetera. It will be a completely new fine art course because it promotes artisan painting techniques. It's satisfying to talk about ideas after you've done something rather than beforehand. When I taught in Salzburg in the summer, the students desperately wanted to talk about everything, and I always had to dampen them down, “We'll talk at the end.” We got to the end, and then they said, “We're exhausted, we don't want to talk!”

MB: At the Tate a few years ago you showed this really confrontational painting. Can you tell me about that painting and how you came to make it?

LM: That painting was inspired by the experience of being in an institution called the DESTE Foundation in Athens. I traveled as a friend of some artists who were showing in the city and we were all invited for a fancy dinner there. The dining room was decorated with the Jeff Koons Made in Heaven series, so we had to sit and eat under these images. Over the years I've been in several places like that, with Araki photographs or whatever hanging. I wanted to make a painting that expressed the banal fatigue I feel when this kind of art is used as décor, when we're expected to just accept pornography as a scenic prop in the art world.

MB: Your painting had a very curious feel to it. Its gravitational field was very peculiar. It was sort of explicit and implicit simultaneously. And now that you explain the circumstances, why you made it, that makes sense. It freaked people out. Was that deliberate?

LM: Writers like Kathy Acker, Peter Sotos, and Dennis Cooper all combine extremes of repetitive prose and exploitative sex and perhaps I was thinking like that, where the fake wood and marble of the restaurant is the equivalent of Acker inhabiting and using *Great Expectations* in the structure of her novel.

MB: It's an infinitely more shocking work than anything Koons has come up with. Going back to what we were saying about the artisan, about craft, the Koonsian model is the complete antithesis. It's American, it revels in a particular idea of American exploitative and abusive consumerism. I don't think there was an ounce of irony in what you did.

MCC: I don't think Koons understands irony. His primary agenda is probably world domination. Which is not what Lucy and I are particularly interested in.

MB: Something that came across in your Secession show, and I find it endlessly fascinating, is this dialogue between American glamour and European intellectualism.

MCC: And it probably works better, does it not, when the energy is toward the East. The great European filmmakers, notably the Italians and Jean-Luc Godard, are drawn to Hollywood, and then they actually make the journey and fail, so I think the distance, the romanticism, the take we have on the West Coast legacy is safest seen through the hourglass of Europe. I did, incidentally, recently reverse this argument by proposing that for a brief historical moment in the 1940s, architectural California had become more Viennese than Vienna!

LM: Certain artists, many in America, for instance Jeff Koons, have massive studios for fabricating their work. The historical model of the Renaissance atelier is invoked to legitimate the overproduction, but in fact it's far more industrial.

MB: There is a fascinating film of Tom Ford interviewing Jeff Koons. He asks Jeff Koons what happens in one of his studios when he is out of town and an artistic decision has to be made, and Koons says, without a flicker of a smile, “Oh, we have management in place”. That's probably one of the most articulate, eloquent things that could be said about his practice.

MCC: That's what made Warhol so European, that self-management. Warhol would be going back at two in the morning, the only person in his entourage who wasn't drunk and hadn't taken any drugs and was therefore able to make work.

MB: And consumed with Eastern European melancholy, anxiety.

MCC: He would go to Mass with mother every Sunday, as a good Catholic boy does. A very European artist, yet one of the greatest American artists.

MB: Lucy, you spent a long time studying how to make murals.

LM: I went to school just to learn the principles of decorative painting. Fake wood and marble, trompe l’oeil, perspective drawing, gilding, grisaille, how to prepare surfaces. And the rules of comportment if you’re working in someone’s house: Don’t smoke, don’t listen to music, wear a clean coat, if your client is titled make sure to address them by the correct title.

MB: Were you interested in the etiquette?

LM: I just lapped it all up. I loved it all. I loved my classmates. It was a complete holiday in a different universe. There were little tips, like, if you want your work to appear immediately better, wash the windows.

MB: Can’t argue with that.

LM: My model for teaching in Düsseldorf is the mistress of that school, Denise van der Kelen.

MB: Did you see the exhibition that Oliver Tepel did on the record label Les Disques du Crepuscule at Kunstverein in Cologne? I thought it was one of the best exhibitions I’d ever seen anywhere.

LM: [to Marc Camille] It was the Belgian equivalent of Factory Records, they shared many of the same musicians. Like with Peter Saville at Factory, Benoit Hennebert’s designs defined the look and feel of the label. Which was softer, more whimsical than Factory. The label has a completely unique emotional sensibility and is the main reason I moved to Belgium, to understand where that could come from. Oliver Tepel organized the show with many original artworks, and contemporary artists responded to that aesthetic.

MB: I see both of you as being connected to pop in its broadest sense: Lucy with Depeche Mode, for instance. And [to Marc Camille] I keep on waiting for you to make a piece based on Lou Reed’s album Berlin.

MCC: It’s probably too late. I might have once done so. I actually saw Lou Reed in Leeds years and years ago. It was a tiny audience, no one knew who he was. And then I saw him many times live in London before he was corrupted by hanging out with Laurie Anderson. And I think taking up yoga. However, at least he’s still alive. I think that the preexisting models I had as a student were so distant from what I was seeking that I was therefore much more greatly drawn to popular music, literature, or cinema. In my formative years I would have said definitely that even someone as unfashionable as Dylan or Godard or Camus was my true hero, more so than any painter. Therefore rock and pop music were cardinal as a context. There were people who were creative in such a way that they were very elegantly able to negotiate all kinds of class barriers that were inherent in visual art culture in the U.K. I remember a tutorial in art school, one of the staff asking, “Do you work to music or not?” Then the question was then asked of the head of the painting

school, and in a most snobbish kind of way he said, “I do, but of course only classical music,” and we thought, “You asshole”.

LM: If you paint fake marble to classical music all the lines get too soft and wavy. You stole Manfred Mann’s girlfriend, didn’t you?

MCC: That’s right, I did, actually! That was a coup. At Ealing School of Art, she was studying fashion, of course, which was the coolest course in that particular art school. The things one confesses to in drunken moments! My fascination with that entire cultural scene was extended when Lucy invited me to present work at one of the later Flourish Nights. And Alex, the lead singer for Franz Ferdinand, was me. Before they hit the big time, otherwise there would have been a queue outside the studio, would there not? We needed a figure within a certain age group who was a surrogate me to actually do the walking for the performance, and Lucy said, “I have a friend who can do it. He’s kind of into art. He’s a musician. He’s slim, he’s dark-haired, he moves well.” And he was very good. I once stood in for Vito Acconci in New York. And I therefore thought if I ever were to write my autobiography I would call it *I Was Vito Acconci, Franz Ferdinand Was Me*.

MB: That’s a great title.

MCC: Maybe that’s all I’d need, just to typeset the title. I wouldn’t have to actually write the biography.

LM: When you did the group show in Ostend... *In the Cherished Company of Others*... there was a piece, I can’t remember the title, the one with the curtain.

MCC: It was the longest title: *We Chose Our Words with Care That Neon-Moonlit Evening; It Was as if We Were Party to a Wonderful Alchemy*.

LM: Behind the curtain there were a number of objects – which one was separated from but could view through peepholes – some flowers, a fox fur stole, a fountain. Pinned to the curtain were various photocopies, one of a very sweet looking fox, one of a flyer for a performance of yours.

MCC: From the inaugural show at the Air Gallery in London.

LM: I saw the little flyer and immediately wanted to steal it, like the way one wants a gig poster off a wall. And of course by the end of the opening someone had stolen it.

MCC: It proved to be a trophy of sorts. I reconstructed that piece more ably in Los Angeles, of all places, where it somehow had extra resonance. With Overduin and Kite who were very good. And luckily I did have the original card, since the stolen one had been a photocopy.

LM: That overwhelming need to have that flyer proves to me that your work possesses cult status, and you are something of a pop star.

MB: When Afterall published the book *Celebration? Realife*, it was very very good. It almost reminded me of one of those 33 1/3 books on a WIRE album or something like that.

MCC: What I like about what we’re attempting today... I’ve often thought of crossovers between what Lucy does and what I do. It’s not related to how the work looks, because our work looks so different. But I think there are many parallels, and one of them surely is that we’re committed to an awareness of the implicit dialectic between high and low culture. That’s kind of what *Celebration? Realife* in 1972 was about, a fascination with popular culture whilst retaining the specificity and the dynamic inherent to radical visual art practice.

MB: The artist and ceramicist Carol McNicoll once said to me that in the early 1970s there was this notion amongst a certain group of art graduates that you could take ideas from the world of fine art or high culture and apply them to the language of absolute mainstream popular culture, the point being you did it without compromising either. In other words the pop had to remain pure pop and the art had to remain pure art. She designed Eno’s peacock feather costume. When he wore it at the *Rainbow*, she saw fans running to the front and heard these girls screaming, “He’s wearing the feathers!” That, for her, was her retrospective at the Tate. Meaning that she’d done it, as far as she was concerned. Is that a sensibility that you can recognize?

MCC: Very much so. I’m surprised at that particular anecdote because the concept wouldn’t have existed then, but Eno was kind of the anorak behind the table full of knobs and wires, and it was the other Bryan who was the peacock. Eno was very much in the background as a kind of scientist-like figure. Almost as a technician.

MB: I think it was all to do with assuming persona.

LM: I’ve been trying to write about Scottish style in my collaborations with Beca. She was a casual, you know, impeccably worn expensive Italian sportswear, whereas my fashion references came from counterculture and from music. When you headed out of the house in some shredded nightdress and swastika armband you could just tell your mum that that’s what the Slits or Siouxsie Sioux wore and that somehow made it OK. It ushers in extremity for all who need it, at 14 or 15.

MB: I don’t want to overload the conversation with Roxyisms, but Eno has this line where he says, “Pop has nothing to do with making music, it’s about creating new imaginary worlds and inviting people to join them”. I think that that’s quite an interesting definition.

MCC: In working on this amazing book of yours, which as I remember concludes just at the point that they’re about to release their first album, the master stroke, were you able to access each Brian as much as the other? So Brian Eno is as important as Bryan Ferry? Because I always felt that the band was in a way a duel between the two, one inherently conservative and one inherently progressive. I invited Eno to give a talk at Maidstone School of Art. Of course it was sold out, and his first line was great. There were people fighting to get in. And he took the mic and said, “You’re here because I was in Roxy Music. I’m not”. And he went into serious stuff, like cybernetics and logarithms and whatever.

LM: They just wanted him to sing some lines from “Baby’s on Fire”.

MB: He once said he’d made 102 albums, and only two with Roxy. It must be quite difficult. I suppose what I keep coming back to is this idea for both of you of the Aesthetic movement and about the House Beautiful. And about the idea of the perfectly crafted interior, but also that kind

of Huysmans-esque mysterious within it. I suppose that in the end for both of you there’s an element that you keep in it of mystery.

LM: I don’t know if I’m really interested in mystery, but rather a kind of precision. I don’t actually make a lot of work, so I try to get it as precise and eloquent as possible.

MB: Given how you work right across media – you’ve done fashion, performance, painting – would your “ultimate” artwork be to design an entire house, like Lord Leighton’s House in Holland Park?

LM: Or Strawberry Hill. What you want of course is the perfect client. You want someone who’s going to give you total freedom and an interesting context that leads to something else. People like Henry van de Velde did complete interiors, which also included what the wife of the client should wear. Which may be good art but it is also fascistic. I side with growing naturally, not megalomania.

MCC: Exactly! Because whilst conceptually challenging, this surely need not be rendered material. I think we’re more interested in asking questions than in answers. There’s an interesting anecdote by Adolf Loos which is implicitly a critique of his arch-rival Josef Hoffmann. The parable is of a client, a very rich merchant, inviting a most successful architect to build a house. It takes a number of years, and he’s very honored that the architect has deigned to accept the commission, and he’s accepted it on the basis that he takes responsibility for everything – the guy’s wardrobe, the cutlery, the carpets, as well as the house. On the night of the inauguration there is a great ball, and eventually the last to arrive is the architect, in his cloak. He comes up the steps and the client welcomes him in. The architect looks somewhat displeased, and the client is perplexed, and he says “Master, what is the problem?” And the architect says, “Your slippers”. And the client says, “But master, you designed them with your own fair hand.” And the architect says, “Yes, but I designed them for the bedroom. We’re in the hall”. It’s such a great answer. You can’t win. That is how fascistic that Hoffmann “take” can become. And you see it today with someone like Norman Foster who bans any architect in his offices from having their own cups. They all have the standard cup, otherwise it would spoil the look of the design studio. That’s the legacy. Whereas someone like Le Corbusier was much more relaxed. He designed a housing estate for the workers of one of the Citroen car plants, each unit called a Citrohan. Thirty years later, when Le Corbusier asked to see the estate, to see how well or not the prefabs had weathered 30 years on, he was driven there, and they were getting worried because people had kitched them up, added trellises, windows, flower boxes. And he was so confident in terms of his own legacy that he found it charming.

LM: Cabinet are in the process of building their own gallery. It will be on the corner of the former Spring Gardens pleasure park, so they can think of it like a pavilion, which is a great architectural history to be part of.

MB: It’s a very brave thing for them to do, since Cabinet has existed to some extent on its nonexistence. It’s impossible to ring them up, and nobody can find the website.

LM: They could be described as being more predisposed to mystery.

MCC: The director of the Hayward refers to them as the Greta Garbo of the art world.

MB: I do rather like the idea of those two existing in some anonymous room somewhere with a couple of packing cases and a telephone. [to Lucy] After the show in Zurich, is there a show coming to London as well, did you say?

LM: Just the showroom at Cabinet of the fashion collection by Atelier in September.

MB: Were you approached by Pringle of Scotland? [meaning, approached as a contemporary artist to lend her face and signature to a product, and sign a contract promising to attend promotional events]

LM: Yes, but I didn't participate. It was through the Serpentine Gallery, and it was not the way I wanted to engage with fashion. Instead I worked on The Inventors of Tradition, an independent project in Glasgow about the Scottish textiles industry. After doing the Beck's Futures in 2000 those things just seem like anti-experiences. The artist never wins. The chance to do something that isn't a compromise is so slim. But I understand that companies like Pringle have to keep moving to survive. They need to shake off the Alan Partridge image.

MB: The last conversation I had with Malcolm McLaren, he'd been asked by Pringle to do it.

MCC: Burberry was revamped, very successfully. Again by an outsider.

LM: Companies like Etro and Missoni are still in the family.

LM: [to Marc Camille] Do you have a dream collaboration you'd like to do?

MCC: Woolworth's would be interesting. Or even Marks & Spencer.

MB: If you're going to go mass, really go mass.